CHAPTERS
ON
JEWISH LITERATURE

YALE
JEWISH
LIBRARY

BY

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS, M. A.

Author of "Jewish Life in the Middle Ages"

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PREFACE

THESE twenty-five short chapters on Jewish Literature open with the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 of the current era, and end with the death of Moses Mendelssohn in 1786. Thus the period covered extends over more than seventeen centuries. Yet, long as this period is, it is too brief. To do justice to the literature of Judaism even in outline, it is clearly necessary to include the Bible, the Apocrypha, and the writings of Alexandrian Jews, such as Philo. Only by such an inclusion can the genius of the Hebrew people be traced from its early manifestations through its inspired prime to its brilliant after-glow in the centuries with which this little volume deals.

One special reason has induced me to limit this book to the scope indicated

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above. The Bible has been treated in England and America in a variety of excellent text-books written by and for Jews and Jewesses. It seemed to me very doubtful whether the time is, or ever will be, ripe for dealing with the Scriptures from the purely literary stand-point in teaching young students. But this is the stand-point of this volume. Thus I have refrained from including the Bible, because, on the one hand, I felt that I could not deal with it as I have tried to deal with the rest of Hebrew literature, and because, on the other hand, there was no necessity for me to attempt to add to the books already in use. The sections to which I have restricted myself are only rarely taught to young students in a consecutive manner, except in so far as they fall within the range of lessons on Jewish History. It was strongly urged on me by a friend of great experience and knowledge, that a small text-book on later Jewish Literature

was likely to be found useful both for home and school use. Such a book might encourage the elementary study of Jewish literature in a wider circle than has hitherto been reached. Hence this book has been compiled with the definite aim of providing an elementary manual. It will be seen that both in the inclusions and exclusions the author has followed a line of his own, but he lays no claim to originality. The book is simply designed as a manual for those who may wish to master some of the leading characteristics of the subject, without burdening themselves with too many details and dates.

This consideration has in part determined also the method of the book. In presenting an outline of Jewish literature three plans are possible. One can divide the subject according to *Periods*. Starting with the Rabbinic Age and closing with the activity of the earlier Gaonim, or Persian Rabbis, the First Period would carry

us to the eighth or the ninth century. A well-marked Second Period is that of the Arabic-Spanish writers, a period which would extend from the ninth to the fifteenth century. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century forms a Third Period with distinct characteristics. Finally, the career of Mendelssohn marks the definite beginning of the Modern Period. Such a grouping of the facts presents many advantages, but it somewhat obscures the varying conditions prevalent at one and the same time in different countries where the Jews were settled. Hence some writers have preferred to arrange the material under the different *Countries*. It is quite possible to draw a map of the world's civilization by merely marking the successive places in which Jewish literature has fixed its head-quarters. But, on the other hand, such a method of classification has the disadvantage that it leads to much overlapping. For long intervals together,

it is impossible to separate Italy from Spain, France from Germany, Persia from Egypt, Constantinople from Amsterdam. This has induced other writers to propose a third method and to trace *Influences*, to indicate that, whereas Rabbinism may be termed the native product of the Jewish genius, the scientific, poetical, and philosophical tendencies of Jewish writers in the Middle Ages were due to the interaction of external and internal forces. Further, in this arrangement, the Ghetto period would have a place assigned to it as such, for it would again mark the almost complete sway of purely Jewish forces in Jewish literature. Adopting this classification, we should have a wave of Jewish impulse, swollen by the accretion of foreign waters, once more breaking on a Jewish strand, with its contents in something like the same condition in which they left the original spring. All these three methods are true, and this has impelled me to refuse to follow any one

of them to the exclusion of the other two. I have tried to trace *influences*, to observe *periods*, to distinguish *countries*. I have also tried to derive color and vividness by selecting prominent personalities round which to group whole cycles of facts. Thus, some of the chapters bear the names of famous men, others are entitled from periods, others from countries, and yet others are named from the general currents of European thought. In all this my aim has been very modest. I have done little in the way of literary criticism, but I felt that a dry collection of names and dates was the very thing I had to avoid. I need not say that I have done my best to ensure accuracy in my statements by referring to the best authorities known to me on each division of the subject. To name the works to which I am indebted would need a list of many of the best-known products of recent Continental and American scholarship. At the end of every chapter

I have, however, given references to some English works and essays. Graetz is cited in the English translation published by the Jewish Publication Society of America. The figures in brackets refer to the edition published in London. The American and the English editions of S. Schechter's "Studies in Judaism" are similarly referred to.

Of one thing I am confident. No presentation of the facts, however bald and inadequate it be, can obscure the truth that this little book deals with a great and an inspiring literature. It is possible to question whether the books of great Jews always belonged to the great books of the world. There may have been, and there were, greater legalists than Rashi, greater poets than Jehuda Halevi, greater philosophers than Maimonides, greater moralists than Bachya. But there has been no greater literature than that which these and numerous other Jews represent.

Rabbinism was a sequel to the Bible, and if like all sequels it was unequal to its original, it nevertheless shared its greatness. The works of all Jews up to the modern period were the sequel to this sequel. Through them all may be detected the unifying principle that literature in its truest sense includes life itself; that intellect is the handmaid to conscience; and that the best books are those which best teach men how to live. This underlying unity gave more harmony to Jewish literature than is possessed by many literatures more distinctively national. The maxim, "Righteousness delivers from death," applies to books as well as to men. A literature whose consistent theme is Righteousness is immortal. On the very day on which Jerusalem fell, this theory of the interconnection between literature and life became the fixed principle of Jewish thought, and it ceased to hold undisputed sway only in the age of Mendelssohn. It was in the

"Vineyard" of Jamnia that the theory received its firm foundation. A starting-point for this volume will therefore be sought in the meeting-place in which the Rabbis, exiled from the Holy City, found a new fatherland in the Book of books.

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CHAPTERS ON
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CHAPTER I

The "Vineyard" at Jamnia

Schools at Jamnia, Lydda, Usha, and Sepphoris.—The Tannaim compile the Mishnah.—Jochanan, Akiba, Meir, Judah.—Aquila.

The story of Jewish literature, after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in the year 70 of the Christian era, centres round the city of Jamnia. Jamnia, or Jabneh, lay near the sea, beautifully situated on the slopes of a gentle hill in the lowlands, about twenty-eight miles from the capital. When Vespasian was advancing to the siege of Jerusalem, he occupied Jamnia, and thither the Jewish Synhedrion, or Great Council, transferred itself when Jerusalem fell. A college existed

there already, but Jamnia then became the head-quarters of Jewish learning, and retained that position till the year 135. At that date the learned circle moved further north, to Galilee, and, besides the famous school at Lydda in Judea, others were founded in Tiberias, Usha, and Sepphoris.

The real founder of the College at Jamnia was Jochanan, the son of Zakkai, called "the father of wisdom." Like the Greek philosophers who taught their pupils in the gardens of the "Academy" at Athens, the Rabbis may have lectured to their students in a "Vineyard" at Jamnia. Possibly the term "Vineyard" was only a metaphor applied to the meeting-place of the Wise at Jamnia, but, at all events, the result of these pleasant intellectual gatherings was the Rabbinical literature. Jochanan himself was a typical Rabbi. For a great part of his life he followed a mercantile pursuit, and earned his bread by manual labor. His originality as a teacher lay in his per-

ception that Judaism could survive the loss of its national centre. He felt that "charity and the love of men may replace the sacrifices." He would have preferred his brethren to submit to Rome, and his political foresight was justified when the war of independence closed in disaster. As Graetz has well said, like Jeremiah Jochanan wept over the desolation of Zion, but like Zerubbabel he created a new sanctuary. Jochanan's new sanctuary was the school.

In the "Vineyard" at Jamnia, the Jewish tradition was the subject of much animated inquiry. The religious, ethical, and practical literature of the past was sifted and treasured, and fresh additions were made. But not much was written, for until the close of the second century the new literature of the Jews was *oral.* The Bible was written down, and read from scrolls, but the Rabbinical literature was committed to memory piecemeal, and

handed down from teacher to pupil. Notes were perhaps taken in writing, but even when the Oral Literature was collected, and arranged as a book, it is believed by many authorities that the book so compiled remained for a considerable period an oral and not a written book.

This book was called the *Mishnah* (from the verb *shana*, "to repeat" or "to learn"). The Mishnah was not the work of one man or of one age. So long was it in growing, that its birth dates from long before the destruction of the Temple. But the men most closely associated with the compilation of the Mishnah were the Tannaim (from the root *tana*, which has the same meaning as *shana*). There were about one hundred and twenty of these Tannaim between the years 70 and 200 C. E., and they may be conveniently arranged in four generations. From each generation one typical representative will here be selected.

THE TANNAIM

First Generation, 70 to 100 C. E.
JOCHANAN, the son of Zakkai

Second Generation, 100 to 130 C. E.
AKIBA

Third Generation, 130 to 160 C. E.
MEIR

Fourth Generation, 160 to 200 C. E.
JUDAH THE PRINCE

The Tannaim were the possessors of what was perhaps the greatest principle that dominated a literature until the close of the eighteenth century. They maintained that *literature* and *life* were co-extensive. It was said of Jochanan, the son of Zakkai, that he never walked a single step without thinking of God. Learning the Torah, that is, the Law, the authorized Word of God, and its Prophetical and Rabbinical developments, was man's supreme duty. "If thou hast learned much

Torah, ascribe not any merit to thyself, for therefor wast thou created." Man was created to learn; literature was the aim of life. We have already seen what kind of literature. Jochanan once said to his five favorite disciples: "Go forth and consider which is the good way to which a man should cleave." He received various answers, but he most approved of this response: "A good heart is the way." Literature is life if it be a heart-literature—this may be regarded as the final justification of the union effected in the Mishnah between learning and righteousness.

Akiba, who may be taken to represent the second generation of Tannaim, differed in character from Jochanan. Jochanan had been a member of the peace party in the years 66 to 70; Akiba was a patriot, and took a personal part in the later struggle against Rome, which was organized by the heroic Bar Cochba in the years 131 to 135. Akiba set his face against frivolity, and pro-

nounced silence a fence about wisdom. But his disposition was resolute rather than severe. Of him the most romantic of love stories is told. He was a herdsman, and fell in love with his master's daughter, who endured poverty as his devoted wife, and was glorified in her husband's fame. But whatever contrast there may have been in the two characters, Akiba, like Jochanan, believed that a literature was worthless unless it expressed itself in the life of the scholar. He and his school held in low esteem the man who, though learned, led an evil life, but they took as their ideal the man whose moral excellence was more conspicuous than his learning. As R. Eleazar, the son of Azariah, said: "He whose knowledge is in excess of his good deeds is like a tree whose branches are many and its roots scanty; the wind comes, uproots, and overturns it. But he whose good deeds are more than his knowledge is like a tree with few branches but many roots, so that if all

the winds in the world come and blow upon it, it remains firm in its place." Man, according to Akiba, is master of his own destiny; he needs God's grace to triumph over evil, yet the triumph depends on his own efforts: "Everything is seen, yet freedom of choice is given; the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the work." The Torah, the literature of Israel, was to Akiba "a desirable instrument," a means to life.

Among the distinctions of Akiba's school must be named the first literal translation of the Bible into Greek. This work was done towards the close of the second century by Aquila, a proselyte, who was inspired by Akiba's teaching. Aquila's version was inferior to the Alexandrian Greek version, called the Septuagint, in graces of style, but was superior in accuracy. Aquila followed the Hebrew text word by word. This translator is identical with Onkelos, to whom in later centuries the

Aramaic translation (*Targum* Onkelos) of the Pentateuch was ascribed. Aramaic versions of the Bible were made at a very early period, and the Targum Onkelos may contain ancient elements, but in its present form it is not earlier than the fifth century.

Meir, whom we take as representative of the third generation of Tannaim, was filled with the widest sympathies. In his conception of truth, everything that men can know belonged to the Torah. Not that the Torah superseded or absorbed all other knowledge, but that the Torah needed, for its right study, all the aids which science and secular information could supply. In this way Jewish literature was to some extent saved from the danger of becoming a merely religious exercise, and in later centuries, when the mass of Jews were disposed to despise and even discourage scientific and philosophical culture, a minority was always prepared to resist this tendency and, on the ground of the views of some

of the Tannaim like Meir, claimed the right to study what we should now term secular sciences. The width of Meir's sympathies may be seen in his tolerant conduct towards his friend Elisha, the son of Abuya. When the latter forsook Judaism, Meir remained true to Elisha. He devoted himself to the effort to win back his old friend, and, though he failed, he never ceased to love him. Again, Meir was famed for his knowledge of fables, in antiquity a branch of the wisdom of all the Eastern world. Meir's large-mindedness was matched by his large-heartedness, and in his wife Beruriah he possessed a companion whose tender sympathies and fine toleration matched his own.

The fourth generation of Tannaim is overshadowed by the fame of Judah the Prince, *Rabbi*, as he was simply called. He lived from 150 to 210, and with his name is associated the compilation of the Mishnah. A man of genial manners, strong intellec-

tual grasp, he was the exemplar also of princely hospitality and of friendship with others than Jews. His intercourse with one of the Antonines was typical of his wide culture. Life was not, in Rabbi Judah's view, compounded of smaller and larger incidents, but all the affairs of life were parts of the great divine scheme. "Reflect upon three things, and thou wilt not fall into the power of sin: Know what is above thee—a seeing eye and a hearing ear—and all thy deeds are written in a book."

The Mishnah, which deals with things great and small, with everything that concerns men, is the literary expression of this view of life. Its language is the new-Hebrew, a simple, nervous idiom suited to practical life, but lacking the power and poetry of the Biblical Hebrew. It is a more useful but less polished instrument than the older language. The subject-matter of the Mishnah includes both law and morality, the affairs of the body, of the

soul, and of the mind. Business, religion, social duties, ritual, are all dealt with in one and the same code. The fault of this conception is, that by associating things of unequal importance, both the mind and the conscience may become incapable of discriminating the great from the small, the external from the spiritual. Another ill consequence was that, as literature corresponded so closely with life, literature could not correct the faults of life, when life became cramped or stagnant. The modern spirit differs from the ancient chiefly in that literature has now become an independent force, which may freshen and stimulate life. But the older ideal was nevertheless a great one. That man's life is a unity; that his conduct is in all its parts within the sphere of ethics and religion; that his mind and conscience are not independent, but two sides of the same thing; and that therefore his religious, ethical, æsthetic, and intellectual literature is one

and indivisible,—this was a noble conception which, with all its weakness, had distinct points of superiority over the modern view.

The Mishnah is divided into six parts, or Orders (*Sedarim*); each Order into Tractates (*Massechtoth*); each Tractate into Chapters (*Perakim*); each Chapter into Paragraphs (each called a *Mishnah*). The six Orders are as follows:

ZERAIM (" Seeds "). Deals with the laws connected with Agriculture, and opens with a Tractate on Prayer (" Blessings ").

MOED (" Festival "). On Festivals.

NASHIM (" Women "). On the laws relating to Marriage, etc.

NEZIKIN (" Damages "). On civil and criminal Law.

KODASHIM (" Holy Things "). On Sacrifices, etc.

TEHAROTH (" Purifications "). On personal and ritual Purity.

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CHAPTER II

Flavius Josephus and the Jewish Sibyl

Great national crises usually produce an historical literature. This is more likely to happen with the nation that wins in a war than with the nation that loses. Thus, in the Maccabean period, historical works dealing with the glorious struggle and its triumphant termination were written by Jews both in Hebrew and in Greek. After the terrible misfortune which befell the Jews in the year 70, when Jerusalem sank before the Roman arms never to rise again, little heart was there for writing history. Jews sought solace in their existing literature rather than in new productions, and the Bible and the oral traditions that were to crystallize a century later into the Mishnah filled the national heart and mind.

Yet more than one Jew felt an impulse

to write the history of the dismal time. Thus the first complete books which appeared in Jewish literature after the loss of nationality were historical works written by two men, Justus and Josephus, both of whom bore an active part in the most recent of the wars which they recorded. Justus of Tiberias wrote in Greek a terse chronicle entitled, "History of the Jewish Kings," and also a more detailed narrative of the "Jewish War" with Rome. Both these books are known to us only from quotations. The originals are entirely lost.

A happier fate has preserved the works of another Jewish historian of the same period, Flavius Josephus (38 to 95 C. E.), the literary and political opponent of Justus. He wrote three histories: "Antiquities of the Jews"; an "Autobiography"; "The Wars of the Jews"; together with a reply to the attacks of an Alexandrian critic of Judaism, "Against Apion." The character of Josephus has been variously esti-

mated. Some regard him as a patriot, who yielded to Rome only when convinced that Jewish destiny required such submission. But the most probable view of his career is as follows. Josephus was a man of taste and learning. He was a student of the Greek and Latin classics, which he much admired, and was also a devoted and loyal lover of Judaism. Unfortunately, circumstances thrust him into a political position from which he could extricate himself only by treachery and duplicity. As a young man he had visited Rome, and there acquired enthusiastic admiration for the Romans. When he returned to Palestine, he found his countrymen filled with fiery patriotism and about to hurl themselves against the legions of the Caesars. To his dismay Josephus saw himself drawn into the patriotic vortex. By a strange mishap an important command was entrusted to him. He betrayed his country, and saved himself by eager submission to

the Romans. He became a personal friend of Vespasian and the constant companion of his son Titus.

Traitor though he was to the national cause, Josephus was a steadfast champion of the Jewish religion. All his works are animated with a desire to present Judaism and the Jews in the best light. He was indignant that heathen historians wrote with scorn of the vanquished Jews, and resolved to describe the noble stand made by the Jewish armies against Rome. He was moved to wrath by the Egyptian Manetho's distortion of the ancient history of Israel, and he could not rest silent under the insults of Apion. The works of Josephus are therefore works written with a *tendency* to glorify his people and his religion. But they are in the main trustworthy, and are, indeed, one of the chief sources of information for the history of the Jews in post-Biblical times. His style is clear and attractive, and his power of grasping the

events of long periods is comparable with that of Polybius. He was no mere chronicler; he possessed some faculty for explaining as well as recording facts and some real insight into the meaning of events passing under his own eyes.

He wrote for the most part in Greek, both because that language was familiar to many cultured Jews of his day, and because his histories thereby became accessible to the world of non-Jewish readers. Sometimes he used both Aramaic and Greek. For instance, he produced his "Jewish War" first in the one, subsequently in the other of these languages. The Aramaic version has been lost, but the Greek has survived. His style is often eloquent, especially in his book "Against Apion." This was an historical and philosophical justification of Judaism. At the close of this work Josephus says: "And so I make bold to say that we are become the teachers of other men in the greatest num-

ber of things, and those the most excellent." Josephus, like the Jewish Hellenists of an earlier date, saw in Judaism a universal religion, which ought to be shared by all the peoples of the earth. Judaism was to Josephus, as to Philo, not a contrast or antithesis to Greek culture, but the perfection and culmination of culture.

The most curious efforts to propagate Judaism were, however, those which were clothed in a Sibylline disguise. In heathen antiquity, the Sibyl was an inspired prophetess whose mysterious oracles concerned the destinies of cities and nations. These oracles enjoyed high esteem among the cultivated Greeks, and, in the second century B. C. E., some Alexandrian Jews made use of them to recommend Judaism to the heathen world. In the Jewish Sibylline books the religion of Israel is presented as a hope and a threat; a menace to those who refuse to follow the better life, a promise of salvation to those who repent.

About the year 80 C. E., a book of this kind was composed. It is what is known as the Fourth Book of the Sibylline Oracles. The language is Greek, the form hexameter verse. In this poem, the Sibyl, in the guise of a prophetess, tells of the doom of those who resist the will of the one true God, praises the God of Israel, and holds out a beautiful prospect to the faithful.

The book opens with an invocation:

Hear, people of proud Asia, Europe, too,
How many things by great, loud-sounding mouth,
All true and of my own, I prophesy.
No oracle of false Apollo this,
Whom vain men call a god, tho' he deceived;
But of the mighty God, whom human hands
Shaped not like speechless idols cut in stone.

The Sibyl speaks of the true God, to love whom brings blessing. The ungodly triumph for a while, as Assyria, Media, Phrygia, Greece, and Egypt had triumphed. Jerusalem will fall, and the Temple perish in flames, but retribution will fol-

low, the earth will be desolated by the divine wrath, the race of men and cities and rivers will be reduced to smoky dust, unless moral amendment comes betimes. Then the Sibyl's note changes into a prophecy of Messianic judgment and bliss, and she ends with a comforting message:

> But when all things become an ashy pile,
> God will put out the fire unspeakable
> Which he once kindled, and the bones and ashes
> Of men will God himself again transform,
> And raise up mortals as they were before.
> And then will be the judgment, God himself
> Will sit as judge, and judge the world again.
> As many as committed impious sins
> Shall Stygian Gehenna's depths conceal
> 'Neath molten earth and dismal Tartarus.
>
> But the pious shall again live on the earth,
> And God will give them spirit, life, and means
> Of nourishment, and all shall see themselves,
> Beholding the sun's sweet and cheerful light.
> O happiest men who at that time shall live!

The Jews found some consolation for present sorrows in the thought of past deliverances. The short historical record known as the "Scroll of Fasting"

(*Megillath Taanith*) was perhaps begun before the destruction of the Temple, but was completed after the death of Trajan in 118. This scroll contained thirty-five brief paragraphs written in Aramaic. The compilation, which is of great historical value, follows the order of the Jewish Calendar, beginning with the month Nisan and ending with Adar. The entries in the list relate to the days on which it was held unlawful to fast, and many of these days were anniversaries of national victories. The Megillath Taanith contains no jubilations over these triumphs, but is a sober record of facts. It is a precious survival of the historical works compiled by the Jews before their dispersion from Palestine. Such works differ from those of Josephus and the Sibyl in their motive. They were not designed to win foreign admiration for Judaism, but to provide an accurate record for home use and inspire the Jews with hope amid the threatening prospects of life.

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CHAPTER III

The Talmud

The Amoraim compile the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.—Representative Amoraim:

I (220-280) Palestine—Jochanan, Simon, Joshua, Simlai; Babylonia—Rab and Samuel.

II (280-320) Palestine—Ami, Assi, Abbahu, Chiya; Babylonia—Huna and Zeira.

III (320-380) Babylonia—Rabba, Abayi, Rava.

IV (380-430) Babylonia—Ashi (first compilation of the Babylonian Talmud).

V and VI (430-500) Babylonia—Rabina (completion of the Babylonian Talmud).

The *Talmud*, or *Gemara* ("Doctrine," or "Completion"), was a natural development of the Mishnah. The Talmud contains, indeed, many elements as old as the Mishnah, some even older. But, considered as a whole, the Talmud is a commentary on the work of the Tannaim. It is written, not in Hebrew, as the Mishnah is,

but in a popular Aramaic. There are two distinct works to which the title Talmud is applied; the one is the Jerusalem Talmud (completed about the year 370 C. E.), the other the Babylonian (completed a century later). At first, as we have seen, the Rabbinical schools were founded on Jewish soil. But Palestine did not continue to offer a friendly welcome. Under the more tolerant rulers of Babylonia or Persia, Jewish learning found a refuge from the harshness experienced under those of the Holy Land. The Babylonian Jewish schools in Nehardea, Sura, and Pumbeditha rapidly surpassed the Palestinian in reputation, and in the year 350 C. E., owing to natural decay, the Palestinian schools closed.

The Talmud is accordingly not one work, but two, the one the literary product of the Palestinian, the other, of the Babylonian *Amoraim*. The latter is the larger, the more studied, the better preserved, and to it attention will here be

mainly confined. The Talmud is not a book, it is a literature. It contains a legal code, a system of ethics, a body of ritual customs, poetical passages, prayers, histories, facts of science and medicine, and fancies of folk-lore.

The Amoraim were what their name implies, "Expounders," or "Discoursers"; but their expositions were often original contributions to literature. Their work extends over the long interval between 200 and 500 C. E. The Amoraim naturally were men of various character and condition. Some were possessed of much material wealth, others were excessively poor. But few of them were professional men of letters. Like the Tannaim, the Amoraim were often artisans, field-laborers, or physicians, whose heart was certainly in literature, but whose hand was turned to the practical affairs of life. The men who stood highest socially, the Princes of the Captivity in Babylonia and the Patriarchs

in Palestine, were not always those vested with the highest authority. Some of the Amoraim, again, were merely receptive, the medium through which tradition was handed on; others were creative as well. To put the same fact in Rabbinical metaphor, some were Sinais of learning, others tore up mountains, and ground them together in keen and critical dialectics.

The oldest of the Amoraim, Chanina, the son of Chama, of Sepphoris (180-260), was such a firm mountain of ancient learning. On the other hand, Jochanan, the son of Napacha (199-279), of dazzling physical beauty, had a more original mind. His personal charms conveyed to him perhaps a sense of the artistic; to him the Greek language was a delight, "an ornament of women." Simon, the son of Lakish (200-275), hardy of muscle and of intellect, started life as a professional athlete. A later Rabbi, Zeira, was equally noted for his feeble, unprepossessing figure

and his nimble, ingenious mind. Another contemporary of Jochanan, Joshua, the son of Levi, is the hero of many legends. He was so tender to the poor that he declared his conviction that the Messiah would arise among the beggars and cripples of Rome. Simlai, who was born in Palestine, and migrated to Nehardea in Babylonia, was more of a poet than a lawyer. His love was for the ethical and poetic elements of the Talmud, the *Hagadah*, as this aspect of the Rabbinical literature was called in contradistinction to the *Halachah*, or legal elements. Simlai entered into frequent discussions with the Christian Fathers on subjects of Biblical exegesis.

The centre of interest now changes to Babylonia. Here, in the year 219, Abba Areka, or Rab (175-247), founded the Sura academy, which continued to flourish for nearly eight centuries. He and his great contemporary Samuel (180-257) enjoy with Jochanan the honor of supplying the

leading materials of which the Talmud consists. Samuel laid down a rule which, based on an utterance of the prophet Jeremiah, enabled Jews to live and serve in non-Jewish countries. "The law of the land is law," said Samuel. But he lived in the realms of the stars as well as in the streets of his city. Samuel was an astronomer, and he is reported to have boasted with truth, that "he was as familiar with the paths of the stars as with the streets of Nehardea." He arranged the Jewish Calendar, his work in this direction being perfected by Hillel II in the fourth century. Like Simlai, Rab and Samuel had heathen and Christian friends. Origen and Jerome read the Scriptures under the guidance of Jews. The heathen philosopher Porphyry wrote a commentary on the Book of Daniel. So, too, Abbahu, who lived in Palestine a little later on, frequented the society of cultivated Romans, and had his family taught Greek. Abbahu

was a manufacturer of veils for women's wear, for, like many Amoraim, he scorned to make learning a means of living. Abbahu's modesty with regard to his own merits shows that a Rabbi was not necessarily arrogant in pride of knowledge! Once Abbahu's lecture was besieged by a great crowd, but the audience of his colleague Chiya was scanty. "Thy teaching," said Abbahu to Chiya, "is a rare jewel, of which only an expert can judge; mine is tinsel, which attracts every ignorant eye."

It was Rab, however, who was the real popularizer of Jewish learning. He arranged courses of lectures for the people as well as for scholars. Rab's successor as head of the Sura school, Huna (212-297), completed Rab's work in making Babylonia the chief centre of Jewish learning. Huna tilled his own fields for a living, and might often be met going home with his spade over his shoulder. It was men like

this who built up the Jewish tradition. Huna's predecessor, however, had wider experience of life, for Rab had been a student in Palestine, and was in touch with the Jews of many parts. From Rab's time onwards, learning became the property of the whole people, and the Talmud, besides being the literature of the Jewish universities, may be called the book of the masses. It contains, not only the legal and ethical results of the investigations of the learned, but also the wisdom and superstition of the masses. The Talmud is not exactly a national literature, but it was a unique bond between the scattered Jews, an unparallelled spiritual and literary instrument for maintaining the identity of Judaism amid the many tribulations to which the Jews were subjected.

The Talmud owed much to many minds. Externally it was influenced by the nations with which the Jews came into contact. From the inside, the influences at

work were equally various. Jochanan, Rab, and Samuel in the third century prepared the material out of which the Talmud was finally built. The actual building was done by scholars in the fourth century. Rabba, the son of Nachmani (270-330), Abayi (280-338), and Rava (299-352) gave the finishing touches to the method of the Talmud. Rabba was a man of the people; he was a clear thinker, and loved to attract all comers by an apt anecdote. Rava had a superior sense of his own dignity, and rather neglected the needs of the ordinary man of his day. Abayi was more of the type of the average Rabbi, acute, genial, self-denying. Under the impulse of men of the most various gifts of mind and heart, the Talmud was gradually constructed, but two names are prominently associated with its actual compilation. These were Ashi (352-427) and Rabina (died 499). Ashi combined massive learning with keen logical ingenuity.

He needed both for the task to which he devoted half a century of his life. He possessed a vast memory, in which the accumulated tradition of six centuries was stored, and he was gifted with the mental orderliness which empowered him to deal with this bewildering mass of materials.

It is hardly possible that after the compilation of the Talmud it remained an oral book, though it must be remembered that memory played a much greater part in earlier centuries than it does now. At all events, Ashi, and after him Rabina, performed the great work of systematizing the Rabbinical literature at a turning-point in the world's history. The Mishnah had been begun at a moment when the Roman empire was at its greatest vigor and glory; the Talmud was completed at the time when the Roman empire was in its decay. That the Jews were saved from similar disintegration, was due very largely to the Talmud. The Talmud is thus one of the

great books of the world. Despite its faults, its excessive casuistry, its lack of style and form, its stupendous mass of detailed laws and restrictions, it is nevertheless a great book in and for itself. It is impossible to consider it further here in its religious aspects. But something must be said in the next chapter of that side of the Rabbinical literature known as the *Midrash.*

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CHAPTER IV

The Midrash and its Poetry

Mechilta, Sifra, Sifre, Pesikta, Tanchuma, Midrash Rabbah, Yalkut.—Proverbs.—Parables.—Fables.

In its earliest forms identical with the Halachah, or the practical and legal aspects of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the Midrash, in its fuller development, became an independent branch of Rabbinical literature. Like the Talmud, the Midrash is of a composite nature, and under the one name the accumulations of ages are included. Some of its contents are earlier than the completion of the Bible, others were collected and even created as recently as the tenth or the eleventh century of the current era.

Midrash ("Study," "Inquiry") was in the first instance an *Explanation of the Scriptures.* This explanation is often the

clear, natural exposition of the text, and it enforces rules of conduct both ethical and ritual. The historical and moral traditions which clustered round the incidents and characters of the Bible soon received a more vivid setting. The poetical sense of the Rabbis expressed itself in a vast and beautiful array of legendary additions to the Bible, but the additions are always devised with a moral purpose, to give point to a preacher's homily or to inspire the imagination of the audience with nobler fancies. Besides being expository, the Midrash is, therefore, didactic and poetical, the moral being conveyed in the guise of a *narrative*, amplifying and developing the contents of Scripture. The Midrash gives the results of that deep searching of the Scriptures which became second nature with the Jews, and it also represents the changes and expansions of ethical and theological ideals as applied to a changing and growing life.

From another point of view, also, the Midrash is a poetical literature. Its function as a species of *popular homiletics* made it necessary to appeal to the emotions. In its warm and living application of abstract truths to daily ends, in its responsive and hopeful intensification of the nearness of God to Israel, in its idealization of the past and future of the Jews, it employed the poet's art in essence, though not in form. It will be seen later on that in another sense the Midrash is a poetical literature, using the lore of the folk, the parable, the proverb, the allegory, and the fable, and often using them in the language of poetry.

The oldest Midrash is the actual report of sermons and addresses of the Tannaite age; the latest is a medieval compilation from all extant sources. The works to which the name Midrash is applied are the *Mechilta* (to Exodus); the *Sifra* (to Leviticus); the *Sifre* (to Numbers and Deuter-

onomy); the *Pesikta* (to various *Sections* of the Bible, whence its name); the *Tanchuma* (to the Pentateuch); the *Midrash Rabbah* (the "Great Midrash," to the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls of Esther, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs); and the *Midrash Haggadol* (identical in name, and in contents similar to, but not identical with, the *Midrash Rabbah*); together with a large number of collected Midrashim, such as the *Yalkut*, and a host of smaller works, several of which are no longer extant.

Regarding the Midrash in its purely literary aspects, we find its style to be far more lucid than that of the Talmud, though portions of the Halachic Midrash are identical in character with the Talmud. The Midrash has many passages in which the simple graces of form match the beauty of idea. But for the most part the style is simple and prosaic, rather than ornate or poetical. It produces its effects by the

most straightforward means, and strikes a modern reader as lacking distinction in form. The dead level of commonplace expression is, however, brightened by brilliant passages of frequent occurrence. Prayers, proverbs, parables, and fables, dot the pages of Talmud and Midrash alike. The ancient *proverbs* of the Jews were more than mere chips from the block of experience. They were poems, by reason of their use of metaphor, alliteration, assonance, and imagination. The Rabbinical proverbs show all these poetical qualities.

He who steals from a thief smells of theft.—Charity is the salt of Wealth.—Silence is a fence about Wisdom.—Many old camels carry the skins of their young.—Two dry sticks and one green burn together.—If the priest steals the god, on what can one take an oath?—All the dyers cannot bleach a raven's wing.—Into a well from which you have drunk, cast no stone.—Alas for the bread which the baker calls bad.—Slander is a Snake that stings in Syria, and slays in Rome.—The Dove escaped from the Eagle and found a Serpent in her nest.—Tell no secrets, for the Wall has ears.

These, like many more of the Rabbinical proverbs, are essentially poetical. Some, indeed, are either expanded metaphors or metaphors touched by genius into poetry. The alliterative proverbs and maxims of the Talmud and Midrash are less easily illustrated. Sometimes they enshrine a pun or a conceit, or depend for their aptness upon an assonance. In some of the Talmudic proverbs there is a spice of cynicism. But most of them show a genial attitude towards life.

The poetical proverb easily passes into the parable. Loved in Bible times, the parable became in after centuries the most popular form of didactic poetry among the Jews. The Bible has its parables, but the Midrash overflows with them. They are occasionally re-workings of older thoughts, but mostly they are original creations, invented for a special purpose, stories devised to drive home a moral, allegories administering in pleasant wrappings unpalat-

able satires or admonitions. In all ages up to the present, Jewish moralists have relied on the parable as their most effective instrument. The poetry of the Jewish parables is characteristic also of the parables imitated from the Jewish, but the latter have a distinguishing feature peculiar to them. This is their humor, the witty or humorous parable being exclusively Jewish. The parable is less spontaneous than the proverb. It is a product of moral poetry rather than of folk wisdom. Yet the parable was so like the proverb that the moral of a parable often became a new proverb. The diction of the parable is naturally more ornate. By the beauty of its expression, its frequent application of rural incidents to the life familiar in the cities, the rhythm and flow of its periods, its fertile imagination, the parable should certainly be placed high in the world's poetry. But it was poetry with a *tendency*, the *mashal*, or proverb-parable, being what the Rabbis

themselves termed it, "the clear small light by which lost jewels can be found."

The following is a parable of Hillel, which is here cited more to mention that noble, gentle Sage than as a specimen of this class of literature. Hillel belongs to a period earlier than that dealt with in this book, but his loving and pure spirit breathes through the pages of the Talmud and Midrash:

Hillel, the gentle, the beloved sage,
Expounded day by day the sacred page
To his disciples in the house of learning;
And day by day, when home at eve returning,
They lingered, clust'ring round him, loth to part
From him whose gentle rule won every heart.
But evermore, when they were wont to plead
For longer converse, forth he went with speed,
Saying each day: "I go—the hour is late—
To tend the guest who doth my coming wait,"
Until at last they said: "The Rabbi jests,
When telling us thus daily of his guests
That wait for him." The Rabbi paused awhile,
And then made answer: "Think you I beguile
You with an idle tale? Not so, forsooth!
I have a guest whom I must tend in truth.
Is not the soul of man indeed a guest,
Who in this body deigns a while to rest,
And dwells with me all peacefully to-day:
To-morrow—may it not have fled away?"

Space must be found for one other parable, taken (like many other poetical quotations in this volume) from Mrs. Lucas' translations:

Simeon ben Migdal, at the close of day,
Upon the shores of ocean chanced to stray,
And there a man of form and mien uncouth,
Dwarfed and misshapen, met he on the way.

"Hail, Rabbi," spoke the stranger passing by,
But Simeon thus, discourteous, made reply:
"Say, are there in thy city many more,
Like unto thee, an insult to the eye?"

"Nay, that I cannot tell," the wand'rer said,
"But if thou wouldst ply the scorner's trade,
Go first and ask the Master Potter why
He has a vessel so misshapen made?"

Then (so the legend tells) the Rabbi knew
That he had sinned, and prone himself he threw
Before the other's feet, and prayed of him
Pardon for the words that now his soul did rue.

But still the other answered as before:
"Go, in the Potter's ear thy plaint outpour,
For what am I! His hand has fashioned me,
And I in humble faith that hand adore."

Brethren, do we not often too forget
Whose hand it is that many a time has set
A radiant soul in an unlovely form,
A fair white bird caged in a mouldering net?

Nay more, do not life's times and chances, sent
By the great Artificer with intent
That they should prove a blessing, oft appear
To us a burden that we sore lament?

Ah! soul, poor soul of man! what heavenly fire
Would thrill thy depths and love of God inspire,
Could'st thou but see the Master hand revealed,
Majestic move "earth's scheme of things entire."

It cannot be! Unseen he guideth us,
But yet our feeble hands, the luminous
Pure lamp of faith can light to glorify
The narrow path that he has traced for us.

Finally, there are the *Beast Fables* of the Talmud and the Midrash. Most of these were borrowed directly or indirectly from India. We are told in the Talmud that Rabbi Meir knew three hundred Fox Fables, and that with his death (about 290 C. E.) "fabulists ceased to be." Very few of Meir's fables are extant, so that it is impossible to gather whether or not they were original. There are only thirty fables in the Talmud and the Midrash, and of these several cannot be parallelled in other literatures. Some of the Talmudic fables are

found also in the classical and the earliest Indian collections; some in the later collections; some in the classics, but not in the Indian lists; some in India, but not in the Latin and Greek authors. Among the latter is the well-known fable of the *Fox and the Fishes*, used so dramatically by Rabbi Akiba. The original Talmudic fables are, according to Mr. J. Jacobs, the following: *Chaff, Straw, and Wheat*, who dispute for which of them the seed has been sown: the winnowing fan soon decides; *The Caged Bird*, who is envied by his free fellow; *The Wolf and the two Hounds*, who have quarrelled; the wolf seizes one, the other goes to his rival's aid, fearing the same fate himself on the morrow, unless he helps the other dog to-day; *The Wolf at the Well*, the mouth of the well is covered with a net: "If I go down into the well," says the wolf, "I shall be caught. If I do not descend, I shall die of thirst"; *The Cock and the Bat*, who sit together waiting for the

sunrise: "I wait for the dawn," said the cock, "for the light is my signal; but as for thee—the light is thy ruin"; and, finally, what Mr. Jacobs calls the grim beast-tale of the *Fox as Singer*, in which the beasts—invited by the lion to a feast, and covered by him with the skins of wild beasts—are led by the fox in a chorus: "What has happened to those above us, will happen to him above," implying that their host, too, will come to a violent death. In the context the fable is applied to Haman, whose fate, it is augured, will resemble that of the two officers whose guilt Mordecai detected.

Such fables are used in the Talmud to point religious or even political morals, very much as the parables were. The fable, however, took a lower flight than the parable, and its moral was based on expediency, rather than on the highest ethical ideals. The importance of the Talmudic fables is historical more than literary or

religious. Hebrew fables supply one of the links connecting the popular literature of the East with that of the West. But they hardly belong in the true sense to Jewish literature. Parables, on the other hand, were an essential and characteristic branch of that literature.

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CHAPTER V

The Letters of the Gaonim

Representative Gaonim:

Achai, Amram, Zemach, Saadiah, Sherira, Samuel, Hai.

For several centuries after the completion of the Talmud, Babylonia or Persia continued to hold the supremacy in Jewish learning. The great teachers in the Persian schools followed the same lines as their predecessors in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Their name was changed more than their character. The title *Gaon* ("Excellence") was applied to the head of the school, the members of which devoted themselves mainly to the study and interpretation of the older literature. They also made original contributions to the store. Of their extensive works but little has been preserved. What has survived

proves that they were gifted with the faculty of applying old precept to modern instance. They regulated the social and religious affairs of all the Jews in the diaspora. They improved educational methods, and were pioneers in the popularization of learning. By a large collection of Case Law, that is, decisions in particular cases, they brought the newer Jewish life into moral harmony with the principles formulated by the earlier Rabbis. The Gaonim were the originators or, at least, the arrangers of parts of the liturgy. They composed new hymns and invocations, fixed the order of service, and established in full vigor a system of *Minhag*, or Custom, whose power became more and more predominant, not only in religious, but also in social and commercial affairs.

The literary productions of the Gaonic age open with the *Sheeltoth* written by Achai in the year 760. This, the first independent book composed after the close of

the Talmud, was curiously enough compiled in Palestine, whither Achai had migrated from Persia. The Sheeltoth ("Inquiries") contain nearly two hundred homilies on the Pentateuch. In the year 880 another Gaon, Amram by name, prepared a *Siddur*, or Prayer-Book, which includes many remarks on the history of the liturgy and the customs connected with it. A contemporary of Amram, Zemach, the son of Paltoi, found a different channel for his literary energies. He compiled an *Aruch*, or Talmudical Lexicon. Of the most active of the Gaonim, Saadiah, more will be said in a subsequent chapter. We will now pass on to Sherira, who in 987 wrote his famous "Letter," containing a history of the Jewish Tradition, a work which stamps the author as at once learned and critical. It shows that the Gaonim were not afraid nor incapable of facing such problems as this: Was the Mishnah *orally* transmitted to the Amoraim (or Rabbis of

the Talmud), or was it *written down* by the compiler? Sherira accepted the former alternative. The latest Gaonim were far more productive than the earlier. Samuel, the son of Chofni, who died in 1034, and the last of the Gaonim, Hai, who flourished from 998 to 1038, were the authors of many works on the Talmud, the Bible, and other branches of Jewish literature. Hai Gaon was also a poet.

The language used by the Gaonim was at first Hebrew and Aramaic, and the latter remained the official speech of the Gaonate. In course of time, Arabic replaced the Aramean dialect, and became the *lingua franca* of the Jews.

The formal works of the Gaonim, with certain obvious exceptions, were not, however, the writings by which they left their mark on their age. The most original and important of the Gaonic writings were their "Letters," or "Answers" (*Teshuboth*). The Gaonim, as heads of the school

in the Babylonian cities Sura and Pumbeditha, enjoyed far more than local authority. The Jews of Persia were practically independent of external control. Their official heads were the Exilarchs, who reigned over the Jews as viceroys of the caliphs. The Gaonim were the religious heads of an emancipated community. The Exilarchs possessed a princely revenue, which they devoted in part to the schools over which the Gaonim presided. This position of authority, added to the world-wide repute of the two schools, gave the Gaonim an influence which extended beyond their own neighborhood. From all parts of the Jewish world their guidance was sought and their opinions solicited on a vast variety of subjects, mainly, but not exclusively, religious and literary. Amid the growing complications of ritual law, a desire was felt for terse prescriptions, clear-cut decisions, and rules of conduct. The imperfections of study outside of Persia,

again, made it essential to apply to the Gaonim for authoritative expositions of difficult passages in the Bible and the Talmud. To all such enquiries the Gaonim sent responses in the form of letters, sometimes addressed to individual correspondents, sometimes to communities or groups of communities. These Letters and other compilations containing Halachic (or practical) decisions were afterwards collected into treatises, such as the "Great Rules" (*Halachoth Gedoloth*), originally compiled in the eighth century, but subsequently re-edited. Mostly, however, the Letters were left in loose form, and were collected in much later times.

The Letters of the Gaonim have little pretence to literary form. They are the earliest specimens of what became a very characteristic branch of Jewish literature. "Questions and Answers" (*Shāaloth u-Teshuboth*) abound in later times in all Jewish circles, and there is no real parallel

to them in any other literature. More will be said later on as to these curious works. So far as the Gaonic period is concerned, the characteristics of these thousands of letters are lucidity of thought and terseness of expression. The Gaonim never waste a word. They are rarely overbearing in manner, but mostly use a tone which is persuasive rather than disciplinary. The Gaonim were, in this real sense, therefore, princes of letter-writing. Moreover, though their Letters deal almost entirely with contemporary affairs, they now constitute as fresh and vivid reading as when first penned. Subjected to the severe test of time, the Letters of the Gaonim emerge triumphant.

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CHAPTER VI

The Karaitic Literature

Anan, Nahavendi, Abul-Faraj, Salman, Sahal, al-Bazir, Hassan, Japhet, Kirkisani, Judah Hadassi, Isaac Troki.

In the very heart of the Gaonate, the eighth century witnessed a religious and literary reaction against Rabbinism. The opposition to the Rabbinite spirit was far older than this, but it came to a head under Anan, the son of David, the founder of Karaism. Anan had been an unsuccessful candidate for the dignity of Exilarch, and thus personal motives were involved in his attack on the Gaonim. But there were other reasons for the revolt. In the same century, Islam, like Judaism, was threatened by a fierce antagonism between the friends and the foes of tradition. In Islam the struggle lay between the Sunnites, who

interpreted Mohammedanism in accordance with authorized tradition, and the Shiites, who relied exclusively upon the Koran. Similarly, in Judaism, the Rabbinites obeyed the traditions of the earlier authorities, and the Karaites (from *Kera*, or *Mikra*, i. e. "Bible") claimed the right to reject tradition and revert to the Bible as the original source of inspiration. Such reactions against tradition are recurrent in all religions.

Karaism, however, was not a true reaction against tradition. It replaced an old tradition by a new one; it substituted a rigid, unprogressive authority for one capable of growth and adaptation to changing requirements. In the end, Karaism became so hedged in by its supposed avoidance of tradition that it ceased to be a living force. But we are here not concerned with the religious defects of Karaism. Regarded from the literary side, Karaism produced a double effect. Karaism itself gave

birth to an original and splendid literature, and, on the other hand, coming as it did at the time when Arabic science and poetry were attaining their golden zenith, Karaism aroused within the Rabbinite sphere a notable energy, which resulted in some of the best work of medieval Jews.

Among the most famous of the Karaite authors was Benjamin Nahavendi, who lived at the beginning of the ninth century, and displayed much resolution and ability as an advocate of free-thought in religion. Nahavendi not only wrote commentaries on the Bible, but also attempted to write a philosophy of Judaism, being allied to Philo in the past and to the Arabic writers in his own time. At the end of the ninth century, Abul-Faraj Harun made a great stride forwards as an expounder of the Bible and as an authority on Hebrew grammar.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, several Karaites revealed much vigor and

ability in their controversies with the Gaonim. In this field the most distinguished Karaitic writers were Salman, the son of Yerucham (885-960); Sahal, the son of Mazliach (900-950); Joseph al-Bazir (flourished 910-930); Hassan, the son of Mashiach (930); and Japhet, the son of Ali (950-990).

Salman, the son of Yerucham, was an active traveller; born in Egypt, he went as a young man to Jerusalem, which he made his head-quarters for several years, though he paid occasional visits to Babylonia and to his native land. These journeys helped to unify the scattered Karaite communities. Besides his Biblical works, Salman composed a poetical treatise against the Rabbinite theories. To this book, which was written in Hebrew, Salman gave the title, "The Wars of the Lord."

Sahal, the son of Mazliach, on the other hand, was a native of the Holy Land, and

though an eager polemical writer against the Rabbinites, he bore a smaller part than Salman in the practical development of Karaism. His "Hebrew Grammar" (*Sefer Dikduk*) and his Lexicon (*Leshon Limmudim*) were very popular. Unlike the work of other Karaites, Joseph al-Bazir's writings were philosophical, and had no philological value. He was an adherent of the Mohammedan theological method known as the Kalam, and wrote mostly in Arabic. Another Karaite of the same period, Hassan, the son of Mashiach, was the one who impelled Saadiah to throw off all reserves and enter the lists as a champion of Rabbinism. Of the remaining Karaites of the tenth century, the foremost was Japhet, the son of Ali, whose commentaries on the Bible represent the highest achievements of Karaism. A large Hebrew dictionary (*Iggaron*), by a contemporary of Japhet named David, the son of Abraham, is also a work which was often

quoted. Kirkisani, also a tenth century Karaite, completed in the year 937 a treatise called, "The Book of Lights and the High Beacons." In this work much valuable information is supplied as to the history of Karaism. Despite his natural prejudices in favor of his own sect, Kirkisani is a faithful historian, as frank regarding the internal dissensions of the Karaites as in depicting the divergence of views among the Rabbinites. Kirkisani's work is thus of the greatest importance for the history of Jewish sects.

Finally, the famous Karaite Judah Hadassi (1075-1160) was a young man when his native Jerusalem was stormed by the Crusaders in 1099. A wanderer to Constantinople, he devoted himself to science, Hebrew philology, and Greek literature. He utilized his wide knowledge in his great work, "A Cluster of Cyprus Flowers" (*Eshkol ha-Kopher*), which was completed in 1150. It is written in a series of

rhymed alphabetical acrostics. It is encyclopedic in range, and treats critically, not only of Judaism, but also of Christianity and Islam.

Karaitic literature was produced in later centuries also, but by the end of the twelfth century, Karaism had exhausted its originality and fertility. One much later product of Karaism, however, deserves special mention. Isaac Troki composed, in 1593, a work entitled "The Strengthening of Faith" (*Chizzuk Emunah*), in which the author defended Judaism and attacked Christianity. It was a lucid book, and as its arguments were popularly arranged, it was very much read and used. With this exception, Karaism produced no important work after the twelfth century.

On the intellectual side, therefore, Karaism was a powerful though ephemeral movement. In several branches of science and philology the Karaites made real additions to contemporary knowledge. But

the main service of Karaism was indirect. The Rabbinite Jews, who represented the mass of the people, had been on the way to a scientific and philosophical development of their own before the rise of Karaism. The necessity of fighting Karaism with its own weapons gave a strong impetus to the new movement in Rabbinism, and some of the best work of Saadiah was inspired by Karaitic opposition. Before, however, we turn to the career of Saadiah, we must consider another literary movement, which coincided in date with the rise of Karaism, but was entirely independent of it.

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CHAPTER VII

The New-Hebrew Piyut

Kalirian and Spanish Piyutim (Poems).—Jannai.—Kalir.

Arabic to a large extent replaced Hebrew as the literary language of the Jews, but Hebrew continued the language of prayer. As a mere literary form, Rabbinic Hebrew retained a strong hold on the Jews; as a vehicle of devotional feeling, Hebrew reigned supreme. The earliest additions to the fixed liturgy of the Synagogue were prose-poems. They were "Occasional Prayers" composed by the precentor for a special occasion. An appropriate melody or chant accompanied the new hymn, and if the poem and melody met the popular taste, both won a permanent place in the local liturgy. The hymns were unrhymed and unmetrical, but they may have been written in the form of alpha-

betical acrostics, such as appear in the 119th and a few other Psalms.

It is not impossible that metre and rhyme grew naturally from the Biblical Hebrew. Rhyme is unknown in the Bible, but the assonances which occur may easily run into rhymes. Musical form is certainly present in Hebrew poetry, though strict metres are foreign to it. As an historical fact, however, Hebrew rhymed verse can be traced on the one side to Syriac, on the other to Arabic influences. In the latter case the influence was external only. Early Arabic poetry treats of war and love, but the first Jewish rhymsters sang of peace and duty. The Arab wrote for the camp, the Jew for the synagogue.

Two distinct types of verse, or *Piyut* (i. e. Poetry), arose within the Jewish circle: the ingenious and the natural. In the former, the style is rugged and involved; a profusion of rare words and obscure allusions meets and troubles the reader; the

verse lacks all beauty of form, yet is alive with intense spiritual force. This style is often termed Kalirian, from the name of its best representative. The Kalirian Piyut in the end spread chiefly to France, England, Burgundy, Lorraine, Germany, Bohemia, Poland, Italy, Greece, and Palestine. The other type of new-Hebrew Piyut, the Spanish, rises to higher beauties of form. It is not free from the Kalirian faults, but it has them in a less pronounced degree. The Spanish Piyut, in the hands of one or two masters, becomes true poetry, poetry in form as well as in idea. The Spanish style prevailed in Castile, Andalusia, Catalonia, Aragon, Majorca, Provence, and in countries where Arabic influence was strongest.

Kalir was the most popular writer of the earlier type of new-Hebrew poetry, but he was not its creator. An older contemporary of his, from whom he derived both his diction and his method of treating poetic

subjects, was Jannai. Though we know that Jannai was a prolific writer, only seven short examples of his verse remain. One of these is the popular hymn, "It was at Midnight," which is still recited by "German" Jews at the home-service on the first eve of Passover. It recounts in order the deliverances which, according to the Midrash, were wrought for Israel at midnight, from Abraham's victory over the four kings to the wakefulness of Ahasuerus, the crisis of the Book of Esther. In the last stanza is a prayer for future redemption:

Bring nigh the hour which is nor day nor night!
Most High! make known that thine is day, and thine the night!
Make clear as day the darkness of our night!
As of old at midnight.

This form of versification, with a running refrain, afterwards became very popular with Jewish poets. Jannai also displays the harsh alliterations, the learned allusions to Midrash and Talmud, which were carried to extremes by Kalir.

It is strange that it is impossible to fix with any certainty the date at which Jannai and Kalir lived. Kalir may belong to the eighth or to the ninth century. It is equally hard to decide as to his birth-place. Rival theories hold that he was born in Palestine and in Sardinia. His name has been derived from Cagliari in Sardinia and from the Latin *calyrum*, a cake. Honey-cakes were given to Jewish children on their first introduction to school, and the nickname "Kaliri," or "Boy of the Cake," may have arisen from his youthful precocity. But all this is mere guess-work.

It is more certain that the poet was also the singer of his own verses. His earliest audiences were probably scholars, and this may have tempted Kalir to indulge in the recondite learning which vitiates his hymns. At his worst, Kalir is very bad indeed; his style is then a jumble of words, his meaning obscure and even unintelligible. He uses a maze of alphabetical acros-

tics, line by line he wreathes into his compositions the words of successive Bible texts. Yet even at his worst he is ingenious and vigorous. Such phrases as "to hawk it as a hawk upon a sparrow" are at least bold and effective. Ibn Ezra later on lamented that Kalir had treated the Hebrew language like an unfenced city. But if the poet too freely admitted strange and ugly words, he added many of considerable force and beauty. Kalir rightly felt that if Hebrew was to remain a living tongue, it was absurd to restrict the language to the vocabulary of the Bible. Hence he invented many new verbs from nouns.

But his inventiveness was less marked than his learning. "With the permission of God, I will speak in riddles," says Kalir in opening the prayer for dew. The riddles are mainly clever allusions to the Midrash. It has been pointed out that these allusions are often tasteless and obscure. But they are more often beautiful and in-

spiring. No Hebrew poet in the Middle Ages was illiterate, for the poetic instinct was fed on the fancies of the Midrash. This accounts for their lack of freshness and originality. The poet was a scholar, and he was also a teacher. Much of Kalir's work is didactic; it teaches the traditional explanations of the Bible and the ritual laws for Sabbath and festivals; it provides a convenient summary of the six hundred and thirteen precepts into which the duties of the Law were arranged. But over and above all this the genius of Kalir soars to poetic heights. So much has been said of Kalir's obscurity that one quotation must in fairness be given of Kalir at his simplest and best. The passage is taken from a hymn sung on the seventh day of Tabernacles, the day of the great Hosannas:

O give ear to the prayer of those who long for thy
salvation,
Rejoicing before thee with the willows of the brook,
And save us now!

O redeem the vineyard which thou hast planted,
And sweep thence the strangers, and save us now!
O regard the covenant which thou hast sealed in us!
O remember for us the father who knew thee,
To whom thou, too, didst make known thy love,
And save us now!

O deal wondrously with the pure in heart
That thy providence may be seen of men, and save us now!
O lift up Zion's sunken gates from the earth,
Exalt the spot to which our eyes all turn,
And save us now!

Such hymns won for Kalir popularity, which, however, is now much on the wane.

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CHAPTER VIII

SAADIAH OF FAYUM

Translation of the Bible into Arabic.—Foundation of a Jewish Philosophy of Religion.

SAADIAH was born in Fayum (Egypt) in 892, and died in Sura in 942. He was the founder of a new literature. In width of culture he excelled all his Jewish contemporaries. To him Judaism was synonymous with culture, and therefore he endeavored to absorb for Judaism all the literary and scientific tendencies of his day. He created, in the first place, a Jewish philosophy, that is to say, he applied to Jewish theology the philosophical methods of the Arabs. Again, though he vigorously opposed Karaism, he adopted its love of philology, and by his translation of the Bible into

Arabic helped forward a sounder understanding of the Scriptures.

At the age of thirty-six Saadiah received a remarkable honor; he was summoned to Sura to fill the post of Gaon. This election of a foreigner as head of the Babylonian school proves, first, that Babylonia had lost its old supremacy, and, secondly, that Saadiah had already won world-wide fame. Yet the great work on which his reputation now rests was not then written. Saadiah's notoriety was due to his successful championship of Rabbinism against the Karaites. His determination, his learning, his originality, were all discernible in his early treatises against Anan and his followers. The Rabbinites had previously opposed Karaism in a guerilla warfare. Saadiah came into the open, and met and vanquished the foe in pitched battles. But he did more than defeat the invader, he strengthened the home defences. Saadiah's polemical works have always a posi-

tive as well as a negative value. He wished to prove Karaism wrong, but he also tried to show that Rabbinism was right.

As a champion of Rabbinism, then, Saadiah was called to Sura. But he had another claim to distinction. The Karaites founded their position on the Bible. Saadiah resolved that the appeal to the Bible should not be restricted to scholars. He translated the Scriptures into Arabic, and added notes. Saadiah's qualifications for the task were his knowledge of Hebrew, his fine critical sense, and his enlightened attitude towards the Midrash. As to the first qualification, it is said that at the age of eleven he had begun a Hebrew rhyming dictionary for the use of poets. He himself added several hymns to the liturgy. In these Saadiah's poetical range is very varied. Sometimes his style is as pure and simple as the most classical poems of the Spanish school. At other times, his verses have all the intricacy,

harshness, and artificiality of Kalir's. Perhaps his mastery of Hebrew is best seen in his "Book of the Exiled" (*Sefer ha-Galui*), compiled in Biblical Hebrew, divided into verses, and provided with accents. As the title indicates, this book was written during Saadiah's exile from Sura.

Saadiah's Arabic version of the Scriptures won such favor that it was read publicly in the synagogues. Of old the Targum, or Aramaic version, had been read in public worship together with the original Hebrew. Now, however, the Arabic began to replace the Targum. Saadiah's version well deserved its honor.

Saadiah brought a hornet's nest about his head by his renewed attacks on Karaism, contained in his commentary to Genesis. But the call to Sura turned Saadiah's thoughts in another direction. He found the famous college in decay. The Exilarchs, the nominal heads of the whole of the Babylonian Jews, were often unworthy

of their position, and it was not long before Saadiah came into conflict with the Exilarch. The struggle ended in the Gaon's exile from Sura. During his years of banishment, he produced his greatest works. He arranged a prayer-book, wrote Talmudical essays, compiled rules for the calendar, examined the Massoretic works of various authors, and, indeed, produced a vast array of books, all of them influential and meritorious. But his most memorable writings were his "Commentary on the Book of Creation" (*Sefer Yetsirah*) and his masterpiece, "Faith and Philosophy" (*Emunoth ve-Deoth*).

This treatise, finished in the year 934, was the first systematic attempt to bring revealed religion into harmony with Greek philosophy. Saadiah was thus the forerunner, not only of Maimonides, but also of the Christian school-men. No Jew, said Saadiah, should discard the Bible, and form his opinions solely by his own reason-

ing. But he might safely endeavor to prove, independently of revelation, the truths which revelation had given. Faith, said Saadiah again, is the soul's absorption of the essence of a truth, which thus becomes part of itself, and will be the motive of conduct whenever the occasion arises. Thus Saadiah identified reason with faith. He ridiculed the fear that philosophy leads to scepticism. You might as well, he argued, identify astronomy with superstition, because some deluded people believe that an eclipse of the moon is caused by a dragon's making a meal of it.

For the last few years of his life Saadiah was reinstated in the Gaonate at Sura. The school enjoyed a new lease of fame under the brilliant direction of the author of the great work just described. After his death the inevitable decay made itself felt. Under the Moorish caliphs, Spain had become a centre of Arabic science, art, and poetry. In the tenth century, Cordova

attained fame similar to that which Athens and Alexandria had once reached. In Moorish Spain, there was room both for earnest piety and the sensuous delights of music and art; and the keen exercise of the intellect in science or philosophy did not debar the possession of practical statesmanship and skill in affairs. In the service of the caliphs were politicians who were also doctors, poets, philosophers, men of science. Possession of culture was, indeed, a sure credential for employment by the state. It was to Moorish Spain that the centre of Judaism shifted after the death of Saadiah. It was in Spain that the finest fruit of Jewish literature in the post-Biblical period grew. Here the Jewish genius expanded beneath the sunshine of Moorish culture. To Moses, the son of Chanoch, an envoy from Babylonia, belongs the honor of founding a new school in Cordova. In this he had the support of the scholar-statesman Chasdai, the first of a long line

of medieval Jews who earned double fame, as servants of their country and as servants of their own religion. To Chasdai we must now turn.

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CHAPTER IX

Dawn of the Spanish Era

Chasdai Ibn Shaprut.—Menachem and Dunash, Chayuj and Janach.—Samuel the Nagid.

If but a small part of what Hebrew poets sang concerning Chasdai Ibn Shaprut be literal fact, he was indeed a wonderful figure. His career set the Jewish imagination aflame. Charizi, in the thirteenth century, wrote of Chasdai thus:

> In southern Spain, in days gone by,
> The sun of fame rose up on high:
> Chasdai it was, the prince, who gave
> Rich gifts to all who came to crave.
> Science rolled forth her mighty waves,
> Laden with gems from hidden caves,
> Till wisdom like an island stood,
> The precious outcome of the flood.
> Here thirsting spirits still might find
> Knowledge to satisfy the mind.
> Their prince's favor made new day
> For those who slept their life away.
> They who had lived so long apart
> Confessed a bond, a common heart,
> From Christendom and Moorish lands,

From East, from West, from distant strands.
His favor compassed each and all.
Girt by the shelter of his grace,
Lit by the glory of his face,
Knowledge held their heart in thrall.
He showed the source of wisdom and her springs,
And God's anointment made them more than kings.
His goodness made the dumb to speak his name,
Yea, stubborn hearts were not unyielding long;
And bards the starry splendor of his fame
Mirrored in lucent current of their song.

This Chasdai, the son of Isaac, of the family of Shaprut (915-970), was a physician and a statesman. He was something of a poet and linguist besides; not much of a poet, for his eulogists say little of his verses; and not much of a linguist, for he employed others (among them Menachem, the son of Zaruk, the grammarian) to write his Hebrew letters for him. But he was enough of a scholar to appreciate learning in others, and as a patron of literature he placed himself in the front of the new Jewish development in Spain. From Babylonia he was hailed as the head of the school in Cordova. At his palatial abode was gath-

ered all that was best in Spanish Judaism. He was the patron of the two great grammarians of the day, Menachem, the son of Zaruk, and his rival and critic, Dunash, the son of Labrat. These grammarians fought out their literary disputes in verses dedicated to Chasdai. Witty satires were written by the friends of both sides. Sparkling epigrams were exchanged in the rose-garden of Chasdai's house, and were read at the evening assemblies of poets, merchants, and courtiers. It was Chasdai who brought both the rivals to Cordova, Menachem from Tortosa and Dunash from Fez. Menachem was the founder of scientific Hebrew grammar; Dunash, more lively but less scholarly, initiated the art of writing metrical Hebrew verses. The successors of these grammarians, Judah Chayuj and Abulwalid Merwan Ibn Janach (eleventh century), completed what Menachem and Dunash had begun, and placed Hebrew philology on a firm scientific basis.

Thus, with Chasdai a new literary era dawned for Judaism. His person, his glorious position, his liberal encouragement of poetry and learning, opened the sealed-up lips of the Hebrew muse. As a contemporary said of Chasdai:

> The grinding yoke from Israel's neck he tore,
> Deep in his soul his people's love he bore.
> The sword that thirsted for their blood he brake,
> And cold oppression melted for his sake.
> For God sent Chasdai Israel's heart to move
> Once more to trust, once more his God to love.

Chasdai did not confine his efforts on behalf of his brethren to the Jews of Spain. Ambition and sympathy made him extend his affection to the Jews of all the world. He interviewed the captains of ships, he conversed with foreign envoys concerning the Jews of other lands. He entered into a correspondence with the Chazars, Jews by adoption, not by race. It is not surprising that the influence of Chasdai survived him. Under the next two caliphs,

Cordova continued the centre of a cultured life and literature. Thither flocked, not only the Chazars, but also the descendants of the Babylonian Princes of the Captivity and other men of note.

Half a century after Chasdai's death, Samuel Ibn Nagdela (993-1055) stood at the head of the Jewish community in Granada. Samuel, called the Nagid, or Prince, started life as a druggist in Malaga. His fine handwriting came to the notice of the vizier, and Samuel was appointed private secretary. His talents as a statesman were soon discovered, and he was made first minister to Habus, the ruler of Granada. Once a Moor insulted him, and King Habus advised his favorite to cut out the offender's tongue. But Samuel treated his reviler with much kindness, and one day King Habus and Samuel passed the same Moor. "He blesses you now," said the astonished king, "whom he used to curse." "Ah!" replied Samuel, "I did as you

advised. I cut out his angry tongue, and put a kind one there instead."

Samuel was not only vizier, he was also Rabbi. His knowledge of the Rabbinical literature was profound, and his "Introduction to the Talmud" (*Mebo ha-Talmud*) is still a standard work. He expended much labor and money on collecting the works of the Gaonim. The versatility of Samuel was extraordinary. From the palace he would go to the school; after inditing a despatch he would compose a hymn; he would leave a reception of foreign diplomatists to discuss intricate points of Rabbinical law or examine the latest scientific discoveries. As a poet, his muse was that of the town, not of the field. But though he wrote no nature poems, he resembled the ancient Hebrew Psalmists in one striking feature. He sang new songs of thanksgiving over his own triumphs, uttered laments on his own woes, but there is an impersonal note in these songs as there is in the similar

lyrics of the Psalter. His individual triumphs and woes were merged in the triumphs and woes of his people. In all, Samuel added some thirty new hymns to the liturgy of the Synagogue. But his muse was as versatile as his mind. Samuel also wrote some stirring wine songs. The marvellous range of his powers helped him to complete what Chasdai had begun. The centre of Judaism became more firmly fixed than ever in Spain. When Samuel the Nagid died in 1055, the golden age of Spanish literature was in sight. Above the horizon were rising in a glorious constellation, Solomon Ibn Gebirol, the Ibn Ezras, and Jehuda Halevi.

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CHAPTER X

The Spanish-Jewish Poets (I)

Solomon Ibn Gebirol.—"The Royal Crown."—Moses Ibn Ezra.—Abraham Ibn Ezra.—The Biblical Commentaries of Ibn Ezra and the Kimchis.

"In the days of Chasdai," says Charizi, "the Hebrew poets began to sing." We have seen that the new-Hebrew poetry was older than Chasdai, but Charizi's assertion is true. The Hebrew poets of Spain are melodious, and Kalir is only ingenious. Again, it was in Spain that Hebrew was first used for secular poetry, for love songs and ballads, for praises of nature, for the expression of all human feelings. In most of this the poets found their models in the Bible. When Jehuda Halevi sang in Hebrew of love, he echoed the "Song of Songs." When Moses Ibn Ezra wrote penitential hymns, or Ibn Gebirol divine

meditations, the Psalms were ever before them as an inspiration. The poets often devoted all their ambition to finding apt quotations from the sacred text. But in one respect they failed to imitate the Bible, and this failure seriously cramped their genius. The poetry of the Bible depends for its beauty partly on its form. This form is what is called *parallelism of line.* The fine musical effect produced by repeating as an echo the idea already expressed is lost in the poetry of the Spanish Jews.

Thus Spanish-Jewish poetry suffers, on the one side, because it is an imitation of the Bible, and therefore lacks originality, and on the other side it suffers, because it does not sufficiently imitate the Biblical style. In spite of these limitations, it is real poetry. In the Psalms there is deep sympathy for the wilder and more awful phenomena of nature. In the poetry of the Spanish Jews, nature is loved in her gentler moods. One of these poets,

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Nahum, wrote prettily of his garden; another, Ibn Gebirol, sang of autumn; Jehuda Halevi, of spring. Again, in their love songs there is freshness. There is in them a quaint blending of piety and love; they do not say that beauty is a vain thing, but they make beauty the mark of a God-fearing character. There is an un-Biblical lightness of touch, too, in their songs of life in the city, their epigrams, their society verses. And in those of their verses which most resemble the Bible, the passionate odes to Zion by Jehuda Halevi, the sublime meditations of Ibn Gebirol, the penitential prayers of Moses Ibn Ezra, though the echoes of the Bible are distinct enough, yet amid the echoes there sounds now and again the fresh, clear voice of the medieval poet.

Solomon Ibn Gebirol was born in Malaga in 1021, and died in 1070. His early life was unhappy, and his poetry is tinged with melancholy. But his unhappiness

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only gave him a fuller hope in God. As he writes in his greatest poem, he would fly from God to God:

> From thee to thee I fly to win
> A place of refuge, and within
> Thy shadow from thy anger hide,
> Until thy wrath be turned aside.
> Unto thy mercy I will cling,
> Until thou hearken pitying;
> Nor will I quit my hold of thee,
> Until thy blessing light on me.

These lines occur in Gebirol's "Royal Crown" (*Kether Malchuth*), a glorious series of poems on God and the world. In this, the poet pours forth his heart even more unreservedly than in his philosophical treatise, "The Fountain of Life," or in his ethical work, "The Ennoblement of Character," or in his compilation from the wisdom of the past, "The Choice of Pearls" (if, indeed, this last book be his). The "Royal Crown" is a diadem of praises of the greatness of God, praises to utter which make man, with all his insignificance, great.

Wondrous are thy works, O Lord of hosts,
And their greatness holds my soul in thrall.
Thine the glory is, the power divine,
Thine the majesty, the kingdom thine,
Thou supreme, exalted over all.

. . . . . .

Thou art One, the first great cause of all;
Thou art One, and none can penetrate,
Not even the wise in heart, the mystery
Of thy unfathomable Unity;
Thou art One, the infinitely great.

But man can perceive that the power of God makes him great to pardon. If he see it not now, he will hereafter.

Thou art light: pure souls shall thee behold,
Save when mists of evil intervene.
Thou art light, that, in this world concealed,
In the world to come shall be revealed;
In the mount of God it shall be seen.

And so the poet in one of the final hymns of the "Royal Crown," filled with a sense of his own unworthiness, hopefully abandons himself to God:

My God, I know that those who plead
To thee for grace and mercy need
All their good works should go before,
And wait for them at heaven's high door.
But no good deeds have I to bring,
No righteousness for offering,
No service for my Lord and King.

Yet hide not thou thy face from me,
Nor cast me out afar from thee;
But when thou bidd'st my life to cease,
O may'st thou lead me forth in peace
Unto the world to come, to dwell
Among thy pious ones, who tell
Thy glories inexhaustible.

There let my portion be with those
Who to eternal life arose;
There purify my heart aright,
In thy light to behold the light.
Raise me from deepest depths to share
Heaven's endless joys of praise and prayer,
That I may evermore declare:
Though thou wast angered, Lord, I will give thanks to thee,
For past is now thy wrath, and thou dost comfort me.

Ibn Gebirol stood a little outside and a good deal above the circle of the Jewish poets who made this era so brilliant. Many of them are now forgotten; they had their day of popularity in Toledo, Cordova, Seville, and Granada, but their poems have not survived.

In the very year of Ibn Gebirol's death Moses Ibn Ezra was born. Of his life little is certain, but it is known that he was

still alive in 1138. He is called the "poet of penitence," and a gloomy turn was given to his thought by an unhappy love attachment in his youth. A few stanzas of one of his poems run thus:

Sleepless, upon my bed the hours I number,
And, rising, seek the house of God, while slumber
Lies heavy on men's eyes, and dreams encumber
Their souls in visions of the night.

In sin and folly passed my early years,
Wherefore I am ashamed, and life's arrears
Now strive to pay, the while my tears
Have been my food by day and night.

. . . . . .

Short is man's life, and full of care and sorrow,
This way and that he turns some ease to borrow,
Like to a flower he blooms, and on the morrow
Is gone—a vision of the night.

How does the weight of sin my soul oppress,
Because God's law too often I transgress;
I mourn and sigh, with tears of bitterness
My bed I water all the night.

. . . . . .

My youth wanes like a shadow that's cast,
Swifter than eagle's wings my years fly fast,
And I remember not my gladness past,
Either by day or yet by night.

Proclaim we then a fast, a holy day,
Make pure our hearts from sin, God's will obey,
And unto him, with humbled spirit pray
Unceasingly, by day and night.

May we yet hear his words: "Thou art my own,
My grace is thine, the shelter of my throne,
For I am thy Redeemer, I alone;
Endure but patiently this night!"

But his hymns, many of which won a permanent place in the prayer-book, are not always sad. Often they are warm with hope, and there is a lilt about them which is almost gay. His chief secular poem, "The Topaz" (*Tarshish*), is in ten parts, and contains 1210 lines. It is written on an Arabic model: it contains no rhymes, but is metrical, and the same word, with entirely different meanings, occurs at the end of several lines. It needs a good deal of imagination to appreciate Moses Ibn Ezra, and this is perhaps what Charizi meant when he called him "the poet's poet."

Another Ibn Ezra, Abraham, one of the

greatest Jews of the Middle Ages, was born in Toledo before 1100. He passed a hard life, but he laughed at his fate. He said of himself:

If I sold shrouds,
No one would die.
If I sold lamps,
Then, in the sky,
The sun, for spite,
Would shine by night.

Several of Abraham Ibn Ezra's hymns are instinct with the spirit of resignation. Here is one of them:

I hope for the salvation of the Lord,
In him I trust, when fears my being thrill,
Come life, come death, according to his word,
He is my portion still.

Hence, doubting heart! I will the Lord extol
With gladness, for in him is my desire,
Which, as with fatness, satisfies my soul,
That doth to heaven aspire.

All that is hidden shall mine eyes behold,
And the great Lord of all be known to me,
Him will I serve, his am I as of old;
I ask not to be free.

Sweet is ev'n sorrow coming in his name,
Nor will I seek its purpose to explore,
His praise will I continually proclaim,
And bless him evermore.

Ibn Ezra wandered over many lands, and even visited London, where he stayed in 1158. Ibn Ezra was famed, not only for his poetry, but also for his brilliant wit and many-sided learning. As a mathematician, as a poet, as an expounder of Scriptures, he won a high place in Jewish annals. In his commentaries he rejected the current digressive and allegorical methods, and steered a middle course between free research on the one hand, and blind adherence to tradition on the other. Ibn Ezra was the first to maintain that the Book of Isaiah contains the work of two prophets—a view now almost universal. He never for a moment doubted, however, that the Bible was in every part inspired and in every part the word of God. But he was also the father of the "Higher Criticism." Ibn Ezra's pioneer work in spreading scientific methods of study in France was shared by Joseph Kimchi, who settled in Narbonne in the middle of the twelfth cen-

tury. His sons, Moses and David, were afterwards famous as grammarians and interpreters of the Scriptures. David Kimchi (1160-1235) by his lucidity and thoroughness established for his grammar, "Perfection" (*Michlol*), and his dictionary, "Book of Roots," complete supremacy in the field of exegesis. He was the favorite authority of the Christian students of Hebrew at the time of the Reformation, and the English Authorized Version of 1611 owed much to him.

At this point, however, we must retrace our steps, and cast a glance at Hebrew literature in France at a period earlier than the era of Ibn Ezra.

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CHAPTER XI

Rashi and Alfassi

Nathan of Rome.—Alfassi.—Rashi.—Rashbam.

Before Hebrew poets, scientists, philosophers, and statesmen had made Spain famous in Jewish annals, Rashi and his school were building up a reputation destined to associate Jewish learning with France. In France there was none of the width of culture which distinguished Spain. Rashi did not shine as anything but an exponent of traditional Judaism. He possessed no graces of style, created no new literature. But he represented Judaism at its simplest, its warmest, its intensest. Rashi was a great writer because his subject was great, not because he wrote greatly.

But it is only a half-truth to assert that Rashi had no graces of style. For, if grace be the quality of producing effects with the

least display of effort, then there was no writer more graceful than Rashi. His famous Commentary on the Talmud is necessarily long and intricate, but there is never a word too much. No commentator on any classic ever surpassed Rashi in the power of saying enough and only enough. He owed this faculty in the first place to his intellectual grasp. He edited the Talmud as well as explained it. He restored the original text with the surest of critical instincts. And his conscience was in his work. So thoroughly honest was he that, instead of slurring over difficulties, he frankly said: "I cannot understand . . . I do not know," in the rare cases in which he was at a loss. Rashi moreover possessed that wondrous sympathy with author and reader which alone qualifies a third mind to interpret author to reader. Probing the depth of the Talmud, Rashi probed the depth of the learned student, and realized the needs of the beginner. Thus the be-

ginner finds Rashi useful, and the specialist turns to him for help. His immediate disciples rarely quote him by name; to them he is "*the* Commentator."

Rashi was not the first to subject the Talmud to critical analysis. The Gaonim had begun the task, and Nathan, the son of Yechiel of Rome, compiled, in about the year 1000, a dictionary (*Aruch*) which is still the standard work of reference. But Rashi's nearest predecessor, Alfassi, was not an expounder of the Talmud; he extracted, with much skill, the practical results from the logical mazes in which they were enveloped. Isaac, the son of Jacob Alfassi, derived his name from Fez, where he was born in 1013. He gave his intellect entirely to the Talmud, but he acquired from the Moorish culture of his day a sense of order and system. He dealt exclusively with the *Halachah*, or practical contents of the Rabbinic law, and the guide which he compiled to the Talmud soon

superseded all previous works of its kind.

Solomon, the son of Isaac, best known as *R*abbi *Sh*elomo *I*zchaki (Rashi), was born in 1040, and died in 1105, in Troyes, in Champagne. From his mother, who came of a family of poets, he inherited his warm humanity, his love for Judaism. From his father, he drew his Talmudical knowledge, his keen intellect. His youth was a hard one. In accordance with mediæval custom, he was married as a boy, and then left his home in search of knowledge rather than of bread. Of bread he had little, but, starved and straitened in circumstances though he was, he became an eager student at the Jewish schools which then were dotted along the Rhine, residing now at Mainz, now at Speyer, now at Worms. In 1064 he settled finally in Troyes. Here he was at once hailed as a new light in Israel. His spotless character and his unique reputation as a teacher attracted a vast number of eager students.

Of Rashi's Commentary on the Talmud something has already been said. As to his exposition of the Bible, it soon acquired the widest popularity. It was inferior to his work on the Talmud, for, as he himself admitted in later life, he had relied too much on the Midrash, and had attended too little to evolving the literal meaning of the text of Scripture. But this is the charm of his book, and it is fortunate that he did not actually attempt to recast his commentary. There is a quaintness and fascination about it which are lacking in the pedantic sobriety of Ibn Ezra and the grammatical exactness of Kimchi. But he did himself less than justice when he asserted that he had given insufficient heed to the *Peshat* (literal meaning). Rashi often quotes the grammatical works of Menachem and Dunash. He often translates the Hebrew into French, showing a very exact knowledge of both languages. Besides, when he cites

the Midrash, he, as it were, constructs a Peshat out of it, and this method, original to himself, found no capable imitators.

Through the fame of Rashi, France took the leadership in matters Talmudical. Blessed with a progeny of famous men, Rashi's influence was carried on and increased by the work of his sons-in-law and grandsons. Of these, Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam, 1100-1160) was the most renowned. The devoted attention to the literature of Judaism in the Rhinelands came in the nick of time. It was a firm rock against the storm which was about to break. The Crusades crushed out from the Jews of France all hope of temporal happiness. When Alfassi died in 1103 and Rashi in 1105, the first Crusade had barely spent its force. The Jewish schools in France were destroyed, the teachers and scholars massacred or exiled. But the spirit lived on. Their literature was life to the Jews, who had no other life. His body

bent over Rashi's illuminating expositions of the Talmud and the Bible, the medieval Jew felt his soul raised above the miseries of the present to a world of peace and righteousness, where the wicked ceased from troubling, and the weary were at rest.

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CHAPTER XII

The Spanish-Jewish Poets (II)

Jehuda Halevi.—Charizi.

Turning once more to the brighter condition of Jewish literature in Spain, we reach a man upon whom the whole vocabulary of praise and affection has been exhausted; a man of magnetic attractiveness, whom contemporaries and successors have agreed to admire and to love. Jehuda Halevi was born in Toledo about 1085, the year in which Alfonso VI recaptured the city from the Moors. It was a fit birth-place for the greatest Jewish poet since Bible times. East and West met in Toledo. The science of the East there found Western Christians to cultivate it. Jew, Moor, and Christian displayed there mutual toleration which existed nowhere else. In the midst of this favorable environment Jehuda Halevi grew

to early maturity. As a boy he won more than local fame as a versifier. At all festive occasions his verses were in demand. He wrote wedding odes, elegies on great men, eulogies of the living. His love poems, serenades, epigrams of this period, all display taste, elegance, and passion.

The second period of Jehuda Halevi's literary career was devoted to serious pursuits, to thoughts about life, and to practical work. He wrote his far-famed philosophical dialogue, the *Cuzari*, and earned his living as a physician. He was not an enthusiastic devotee to medicine, however. "Toledo is large," he wrote to a friend, "and my patients are hard masters. I, their slave, spend my days in serving their will, and consume my years in healing their infirmities." Before making up a prescription, he, like Sir Thomas Browne, used to say a prayer in which he confessed that he had no great faith in the healing powers

of his art. Jehuda Halevi was, indeed, dissatisfied with his life altogether. "My heart is in the East, but I am sunk in the West," he lamented. He was unhappy because his beloved was far from him; his lady-love was beyond the reach of his earnest gaze. In Heine's oft-quoted words,

> She for whom the Rabbi languished
> Was a woe-begone poor darling,
> Desolation's very image,
> And her name—Jerusalem.

The eager passion for one sight of Jerusalem grew on him, and dominated the third portion of his life. At length nothing could restrain him; go he would, though he die in the effort. And go he did, and die he did in the effort. The news of his determination spread through Spain, and everywhere hands were held out to restrain him. But his heart lightened as the day of departure came. His poems written at this time are hopeful and full of cheery feeling. In Egypt, a determined

attempt was made by the Jews to keep him among them. But it was vain. Onward to Jerusalem: this was his one thought. He tarried in Egypt but a short while, then he passed to Tyre and Damascus. At Damascus, in the year 1140 or thereabouts, he wrote the ode to Zion which made his name immortal, an ode in which he gave vent to all the intense passion which filled his soul. The following are some stanzas taken from this address to Jerusalem:

The glory of the Lord has been alway
Thy sole and perfect light;
Thou needest not the sun to shine by day,
Nor moon and stars to illumine thee by night.
I would that, where God's spirit was of yore
Poured out unto thy holy ones, I might
There too my soul outpour!
The house of kings and throne of God wert thou,
How comes it then that now
Slaves fill the throne where sat thy kings before?

Oh! who will lead me on
To seek the spots where, in far distant years,
The angels in their glory dawned upon
Thy messengers and seers?

Oh! who will give me wings
That I may fly away,
And there, at rest from all my wanderings,
The ruins of my heart among thy ruins lay?

. . . . . .

The Lord desires thee for his dwelling-place
Eternally, and bless'd
Is he whom God has chosen for the grace
Within thy courts to rest.
Happy is he that watches, drawing near,
Until he sees thy glorious lights arise,
And over whom thy dawn breaks full and clear
Set in the orient skies.
But happiest he, who, with exultant eyes,
The bliss of thy redeemed ones shall behold,
And see thy youth renewed as in the days of old.

Soon after writing this Jehuda arrived near the Holy City. He was by her side at last, by the side of his beloved. Then, legend tells us, through a gate an Arab horseman dashed forth: he raised his spear, and slew the poet, who fell at the threshold of his dear Jerusalem, with a song of Zion on his lips.

The new-Hebrew poetry did not survive him. Persecution froze the current of the

Jewish soul. Poets, indeed, arose after Jehuda Halevi in Germany as in Spain. Sometimes, as in the hymns of the "German" Meir of Rothenburg, a high level of passionate piety is reached. But it has well been said that "the hymns of the Spanish writers link man's soul to his Maker: the hymns of the Germans link Israel to his God." Only in Spain Hebrew poetry was universal, in the sense in which the Psalms are universal. Even in Spain itself, the death of Jehuda Halevi marked the close of this higher inspiration. The later Spanish poets, Charizi and Zabara (middle and end of the twelfth century), were satirists rather than poets, witty, sparkling, ready with quaint quips, but local and imitative in manner and subject. Zabara must receive some further notice in a later chapter because of his connection with medieval folk-lore. Of Charizi's chief work, the *Tachkemoni*, it may be said that it is excellent of its type. The stories which it tells in unmetrical

rhyme are told in racy style, and its criticisms on men and things are clever and striking. As a literary critic also Charizi ranks high, and there is much skill in the manner in which he links together, round the person of his hero, the various narratives which compose the *Tachkemoni*. The experiences he relates are full of humor and surprises. As a phrase-maker, Charizi was peculiarly happy, his command of Hebrew being masterly. But his most conspicuous claim to high rank lies in his origination of that blending of grim irony with bright wit which became characteristic of all Jewish humorists, and reached its climax in Heine. But Charizi himself felt that his art as a Hebrew poet was decadent. Great poets of Jewish race have risen since, but the songs they have sung have not been songs of Zion, and the language of their muse has not been the language of the Hebrew Bible.

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